

Speech Play the Game Award 2013

Speech by Søren Riiskjær, vice chair of Play the Game/Danish Institute for Sports Studies who presented the award on behalf of the Play the Game Award committee.

The Play the Game Award has been given at every Play the Game conference since 2002 in pursuit of the goals of the initiative: to strengthen the basic ethical values of sport and encourage democracy, transparency and freedom of expression in world sport.

It pays tribute to an individual or a group of persons who in their professional careers or as volunteers in sport have made an outstanding effort to strengthen the basic ethical values of sport.

The award is awarded by a committee consisting of:

- The chairman of the board Johs Poulsen
- One member of the board, this time Søren Riiskjær, vice chairman of the board
- The international director of Play the Game (Jens Sejer Andersen)
- The director of Play the Game/Danish Inst. for Sports Studies (Henrik Brandt)
- And the previous award winners from 2011: the two renowned investigative journalists Jens Weinreich and Andrew Jennings

The award has previously been conferred to courageous journalists and whistleblowers who went up against the wind and challenged the leadership in big sports organisations.

This time we are looking in another direction.

It is a standard argument among sports leaders that change in international sport will not happen just because journalists and whistleblowers and organisations like Play the Game make lots of noise from the outside.

Change must come from the inside, the argument sounds. And on the inside you have to be diplomatic and discreet and very low-key...

But it is sometimes difficult to find leaders on the inside of sport who are really committed to go to the root of problems like:

- failed or half-hearted anti-doping strategies
- poor governance structures in international organisations almost . inviting leaders to make personal gains or be tempted by outright corruption – or to protect their power with dictatorial management
- lack of consequences for abuse of positions and mismanagement by many sports leaders who have broken the rules. While athletes are often subjected to very tough sanctions by the same leaders if they cross much thinner lines...

But actually there is at least one courageous insider who proves you can achieve a lot, even if he is often anything but discreet, diplomatic and low-key...

And we are definitely not talking about a Mr. Nobody in the international sports movement.

It is not a person who made his way up the hierarchy by patting his peers on the back - without ever expressing a controversial opinion.

It might not be a person you will always agree with – or like to disagree with – and it might be a person that also from time to time opted to choose his internal fights with care.

But the person we are going to honour today with the Play the Game Award - consisting of an art piece made by the exceptional former Danish tennis player and artist Torben Ulrich - is a person that has certainly added enormous value to the world of sport during his many years as a top level international sports leader.

- He was one of the leaders that personally took tough responsibility for cleaning the house and changing some of the most outdated structures in the International Olympic Committee when the house was really burning in the late 1990's. That process did not only win him friends...
- He was one of the architects behind the quite successful establishment of the World Anti Doping Agency, WADA, in its first years in a climate where governments and the sports movement deeply mistrusted each other but although both parties recognized that the doping abuse in sport had gone out of control. That pioneer effort didn't only win him friends either.
- He is always available to the press and to the homeless questions and he is always open to take part in any debate, and
- His integrity is out of question

As you might have heard earlier today, this person has not abandoned his direct and critical style.

He is ruthless and direct when it comes to pointing his fingers at all the critical points in the international fight against doping.

It is necessary to have these very direct but still constructive critics at the very centre of the sports movement – and it is necessary that people from the inside are also willing to and able to engage with the outside world.

This person has always put himself at the disposal of the public debate – also in stormy waters and when the winds were not in his favour.

As long as we have known him, he has been a friend and firm supporter of Play the Game and our core values. Even when he was a candidate for the IOC Presidency in 2000, he decided to come to our conference for the first time.

This was seen as very controversial by some members of the Olympic family, and it definitely did not help his campaign. Over the years, his support for Play the Game's agenda has probably not earned him many additional points in the corridors of sports power in the Olympic family - but it has earned him our respect and gratitude.

So now we have arrived at the point where we can announce the winner of the Play the Game Award 2013.

The Award committee was unanimous in its decision. Even the most critical souls in the group admitted willingly that our man was a worthy recipient of the Play the Game Award 2013:

Richard W. Pound